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(54) **CHEMICAL MECHANICAL POLISHER WITH HUB ARMS MOUNTED**

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B24B 37/34 (2012.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***B24B 37/10*** (2013.01); ***B24B 37/345*** (2013.01)

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See application file for complete search history.

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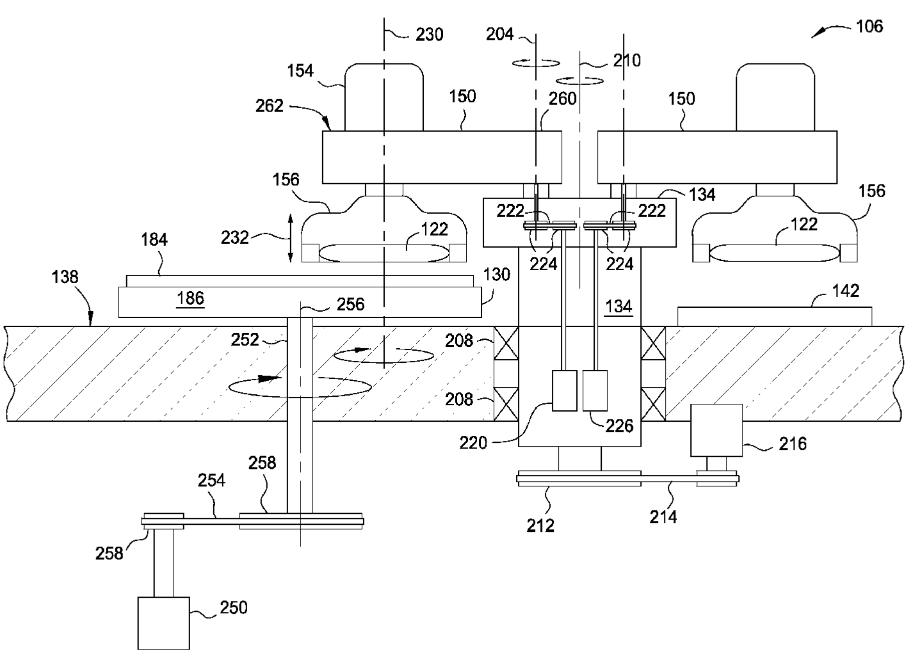
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A chemical mechanical polishing system is provided. The chemical mechanical polishing system includes a platen, a load cup, a hub, a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and load cup, and a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and load cup the second arm rotatable independently from the hub.

20 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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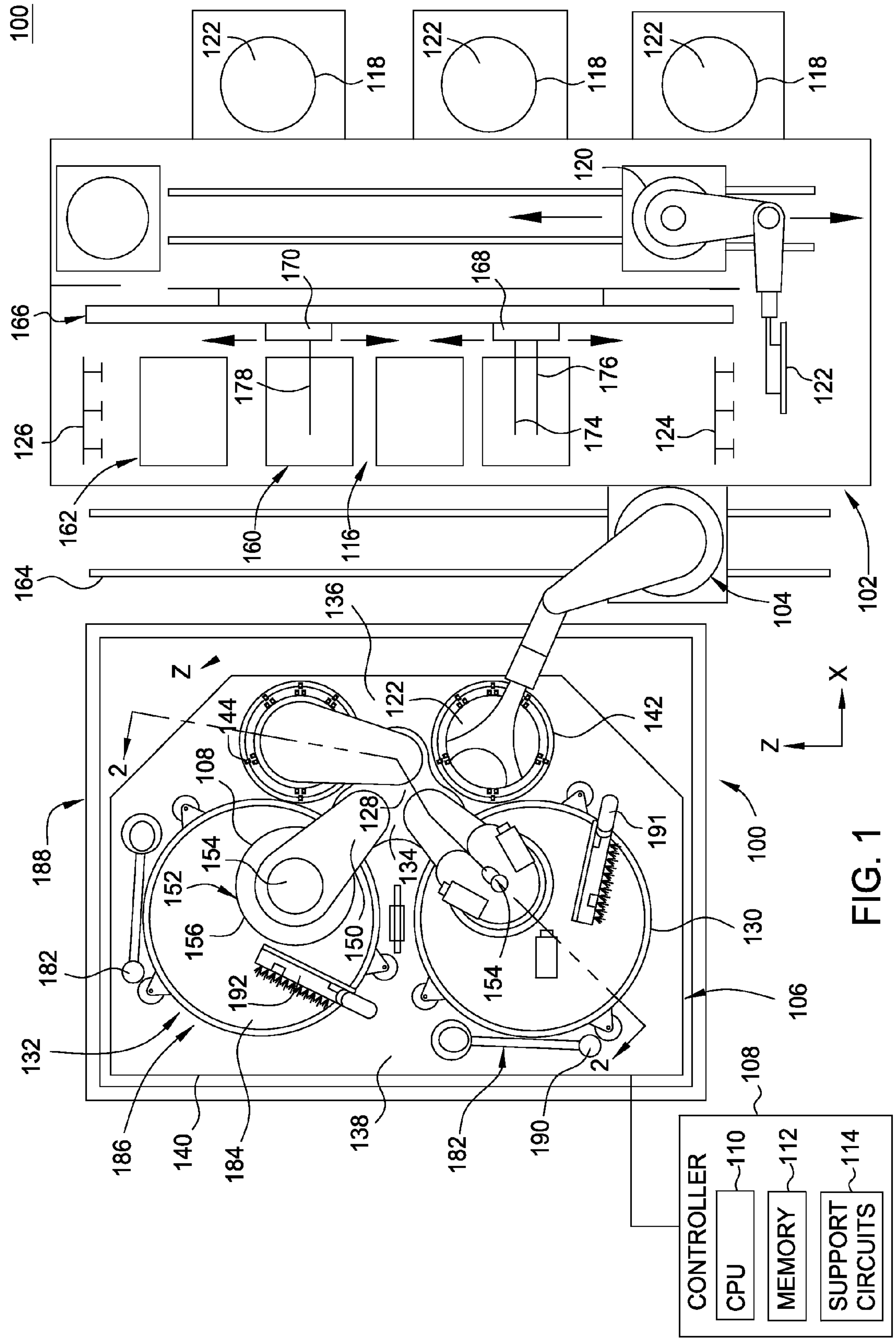
100
122
118
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170
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142
108
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152
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150
128
134
130
191
188
182
192
184
132
186
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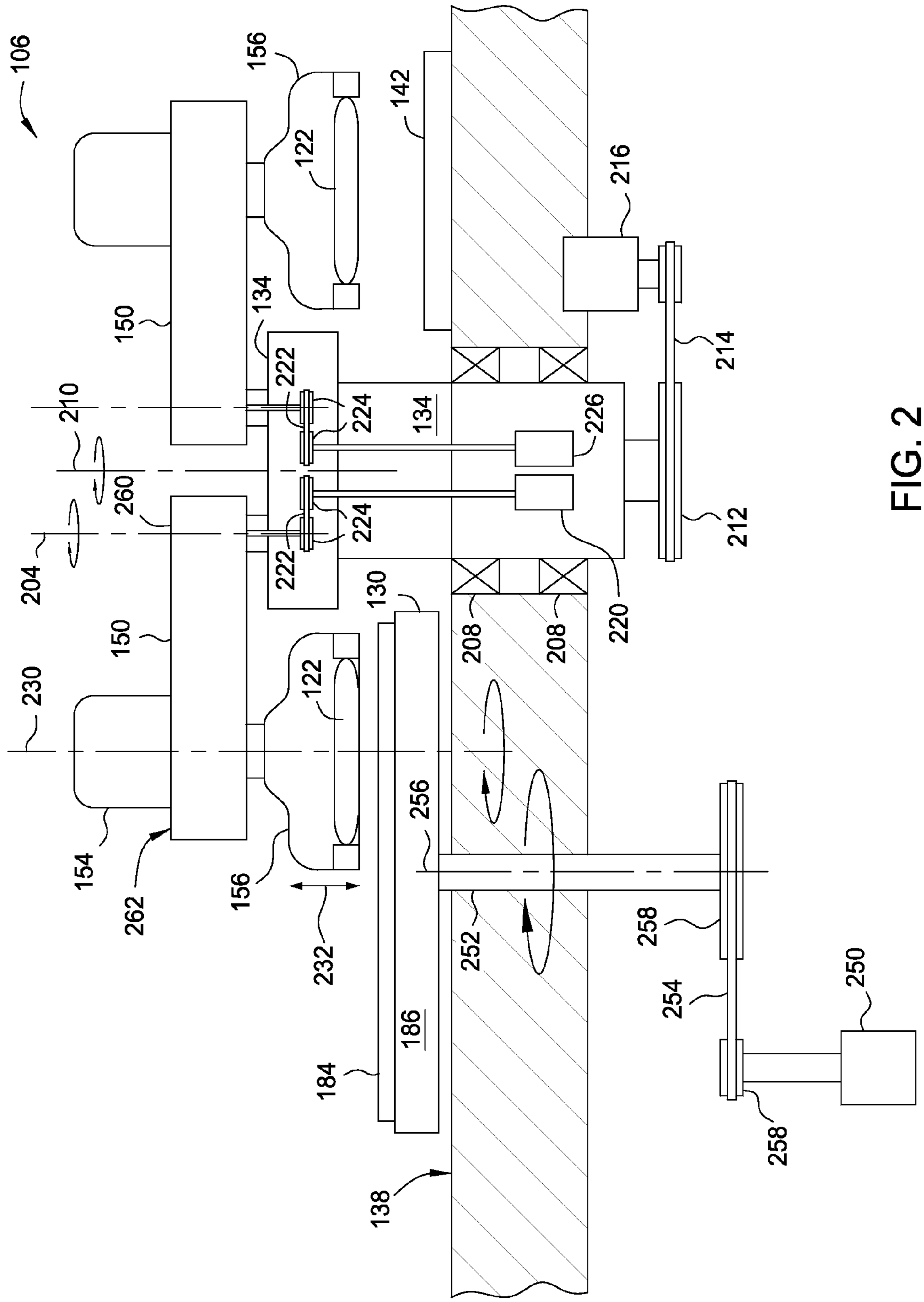
138
190
106
2
Z
X
CONTROLLER
CPU
MEMORY
SUPPORT CIRCUITS
110
112
114

FIG. 1


106
156
142
122
216
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210
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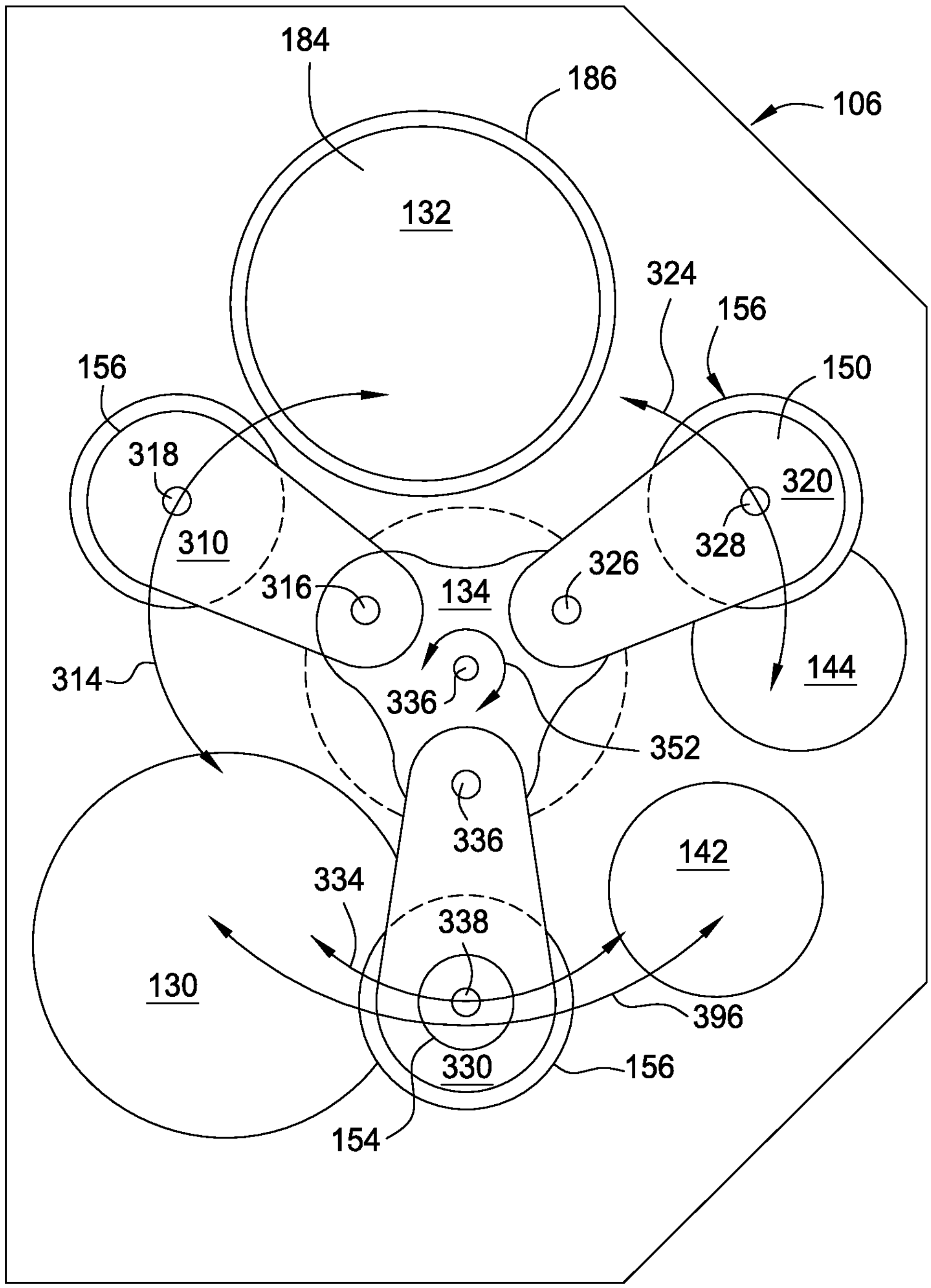
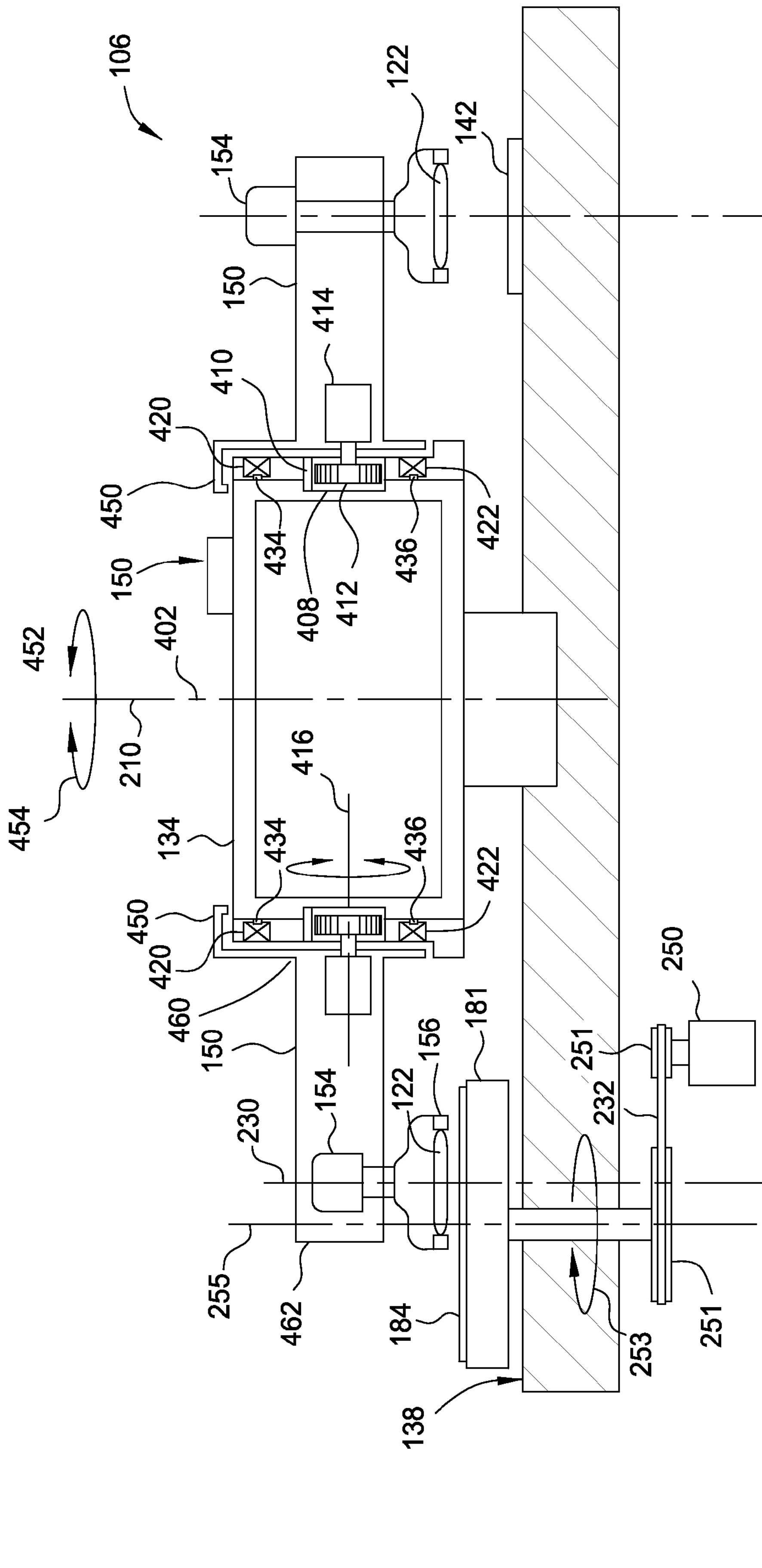
222
220
130
208
208
150
230
122
256
154
262
156
258
232
252
254
250
186
184
258
138

FIG. 2



184
186
106
132
324
156
156
150
318
320
310
328
316
326
134
144
314
336
352
336
142
334
338
130
396
330
156
154

FIG. 3


106
154
122
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150
414
410
420
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434
408
412
436
422
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452
402
210
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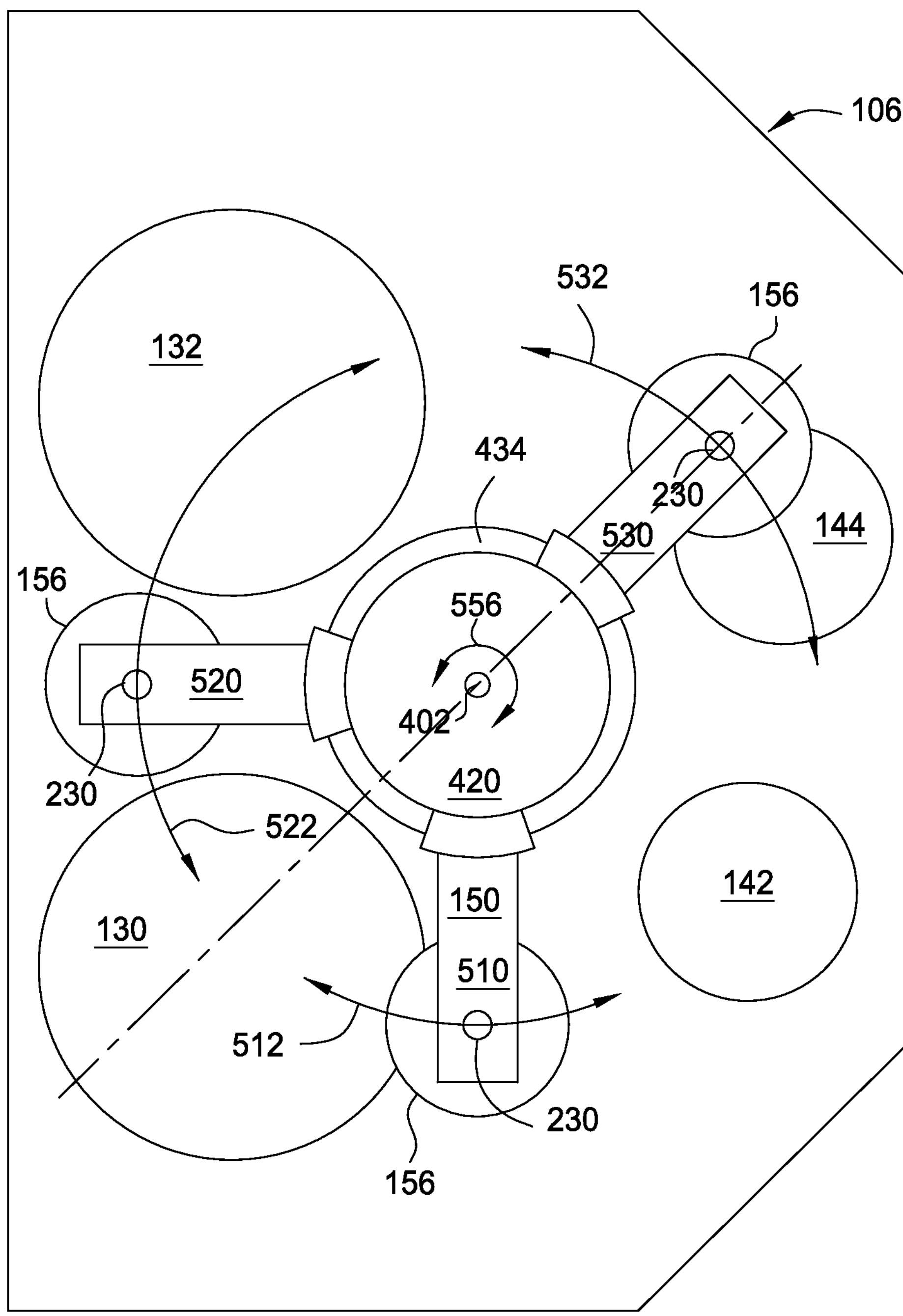
134
434
436
422
450
420
460
150
181
156
154
122
230
251
250
232
255
462
184
253
251
138

FIG. 4


106
132
532
156
434
230
144
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156
556
520
402
230
420
522
142
150
130
510
512
230
156

FIG. 5

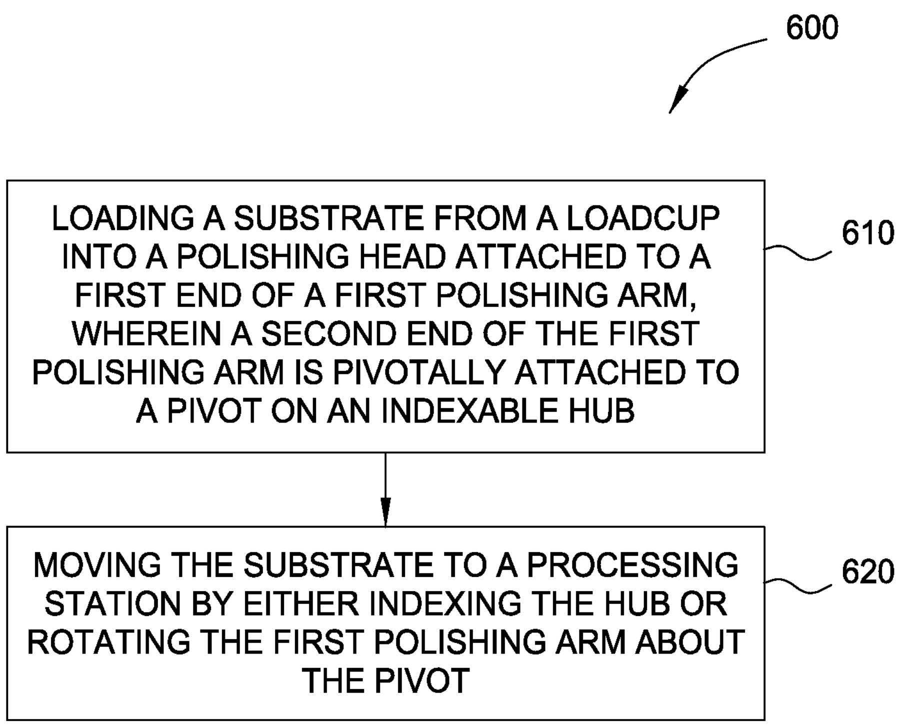
600
LOADING A SUBSTRATE FROM A LOADCUP INTO A POLISHING HEAD ATTACHED TO A FIRST END OF A FIRST POLISHING ARM, WHEREIN A SECOND END OF THE FIRST POLISHING ARM IS PIVOTALLY ATTACHED TO A PIVOT ON AN INDEXABLE HUB
610
MOVING THE SUBSTRATE TO A PROCESSING STATION BY EITHER INDEXING THE HUB OR ROTATING THE FIRST POLISHING ARM ABOUT THE PIVOT
620

FIG. 6

CHEMICAL MECHANICAL POLISHER WITH HUB ARMS MOUNTED

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/891,833, filed Oct. 16, 2012, of which is incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

Embodiments of the present invention generally relate to a method and apparatus for handling semiconductor substrates in a chemical mechanical polishing system.

2. Description of the Related Art

In the process of fabricating modern semiconductor integrated circuits (ICS), it is necessary to develop various material layers over previously formed layers and structures. However, the prior formations often leave the top surface topography unsuitable for the position of subsequent layers of material. For example, when printing a photolithographic pattern having small geometries over previously formed layers, a shallow depth of focus is required. Accordingly, it becomes essential to have a flat and planar surface, otherwise, some of the pattern will be in focus while other parts of the pattern will not. In addition, if the irregularities are not leveled prior to certain processing steps, the surface topography of the substrate can become even more irregular, causing further problems as the layers stack up during further processing. Depending on the die type and the size of geometries involved, the surface irregularities can lead to poor yield and device performance. Consequently, it is desirable to achieve some type of planarization, or polishing, of films during IC fabrication.

One method for planarizing a layer during IC fabrication is chemical mechanical polishing (CMP). In general, CMP involves pressing of the substrate against a polishing material while proving relative motion therebetween in presence of a polishing fluid. The polishing fluid that typically contains at least one of an abrasive or chemical polishing composition that assists in the planarization process. The substrate may progress through several different polishing materials of finer abrasive materials and/or chemistries to achieve a highly planarized or polished surface. Once polished, the semiconductor substrate is transferred from the CMP to a series of cleaning modules that remove the abrasive particles and/or other contaminants that cling to the substrate after polishing.

As customer application needs have become more diverse and complex, a desire to provide a configurable and flexible CMP system has become paramount. Conventional CMP systems generally require all polishing heads to move between a polishing platen and a load cup or to other process/metrology stations in unison, thus making throughput dependent on the completion of the longest process being performed in the system. In addition, it is desirable that the CMP system be configured to minimize defect issues (real and perceived) from particles generated by the motion of the components of the system.

Therefore, there is a need in the art for an improved method and apparatus for handling semiconductor substrates in a CMP system.

SUMMARY

In a first embodiment, a chemical mechanical polishing system is provided. The chemical mechanical polishing system includes a platen, a load cup, a hub, a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and load cup, and a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and load cup the second arm rotatable independently from the hub.

In a second embodiment, a chemical mechanical polishing system is provided. The chemical mechanical polishing system includes a platen, a load cup, a hub rotatable about a first axis, a first polishing arm pivotally attached to a first pivot on the hub and moveable between the platen and load cup, and a second polishing arm pivotally attached to a second pivot on the hub and moveable between the platen and load cup.

In yet another embodiment, a method for moving a substrate by a substrate handler is provided. The method includes loading a substrate from a load cup into a first polishing head attached to a first end of a first polishing arm, wherein a second end of the first polishing arm is pivotally attached to a first pivot on an indexable hub, and moving the substrate to a processing station by either indexing the hub or rotating the first polishing arm about the pivot.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

So that the manner in which the above recited embodiments of the invention are obtained and can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the invention, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to the embodiments thereof, which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments of the invention, and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, for the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

FIG. **1** is a top view of a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) system having a polishing module;

FIG. **2** is a partial cross sectional view for the polishing module of FIG. **1** taken along section lines **2-2**, illustrating one embodiment of a substrate handler;

FIG. **3** is a top view of the polishing module of FIG. **2** having arms extending from a central hub;

FIG. **4** depicts the partial cross sectional view of another embodiment of a substrate handler that may be used in the CMP system **100** of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **5** is a top view of the polishing module of FIG. **4** having a central hub and attached arms; and

FIG. **6** is a flow diagram of a method for moving a substrate through a chemical mechanical polishing system.

To facilitate understanding, identical reference numerals have been used, wherever possible, to designate identical elements that are common to the Figures. Additionally, elements of one embodiment may be advantageously adapted for utilization in other embodiments described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments for a method and apparatus for handling substrates through a chemical mechanical planarizing (CMP) system are provided. The substrate handler includes a central hub with independently moveable polishing arms, each arm supporting a polishing head. Although the system is illustratively described having at least two processing stations suitable for planarizing a substrate disposed around a central substrate handler, it is contemplated that the system may be arranged in other configurations with more than two processing stations and optionally, more than two substrate handlers. Furthermore, the embodiments disclosed below focus primarily on removing material from, e.g., planarizing or polishing, a substrate, it is contemplated that the teachings disclosed herein may be used in other processing systems, for example, electroplating systems, and edge bevel removal systems, where efficient transfer of substrates is desired.

In one embodiment, the hub may rotate, or index, and the polishing arms are pivotally attached to an outer portion of the hub wherein a pivot for the polishing arms is incongruent with the rotational axis of the hub. This provides each polishing arm with the ability to rotate and move a substrate between different modules of the CMP system independent of the movement of the hub or other polishing arms and substrates. Thus, the substrate handler provides independent motion for each polishing head and independent movement for a substrate from a platen to a load cup or other process/metrology station.

In a second embodiment, the rotational axes for all the polishing arms may be coaxial with the center of a rotating or non-rotating hub. Each polishing head may move about a perimeter of the hub to independently position the other polishing heads coupled to the hub. Thus, the substrate may be moved to an available and accessible platen or load cup location independently of the other substrates being held by the substrate handler.

The drive gear assembly for moving the polishing arms of the substrate handler is advantageously inward of the platen. Therefore, any particulars or other contamination generated by the drive gear assembly cannot fall onto the platen and affect substrate polishing operations.

FIG. **1** is a plan view of a CMP system **100** which provides independent motion of each polishing head, according to an embodiment. The exemplary system **100** generally comprises a factory interface **102**, a loading robot **104**, and a polishing module **106** coupled to a machine base **140**. The loading robot **104** is disposed on a set of rails **164** proximate the factory interface **102** and the polishing module **106** to facilitate the transfer of substrates **122** therebetween.

A controller **108** is provided to facilitate control and integration of the modules of the CMP system **100**. The controller **108** comprises a central processing unit (CPU) **110**, a memory **112** and support circuits **114**. The controller **108** is coupled to the various components of the CMP system **100** to facilitate control of, for example, the planarizing, cleaning and transfer processes.

The factory interface **102** generally includes a cleaner **116** and one or more wafer cassettes **118**. An interface robot **120** is employed to transfer substrates **122** between the wafer cassettes **118**, the cleaner **116** and an input module **124**. The input module **124** is positioned to facilitate transfer of substrates **122** between the polishing module **106** and the factory interface **102** by grippers, for example, vacuum grippers or mechanical clamps.

The cleaner **116** removes polishing debris and/or polishing fluid that remains after polishing from the substrates. The cleaner **116** includes a handler **166** that moves substrates from the input module **124** through a plurality of cleaning modules **160** to a dryer **162**. In one embodiment, the cleaning modules **160** include brush boxes and megasonic cleaners.

The substrate handler **166** generally includes a first robot **168** and a second robot **170**. The first robot **168** includes at least one gripper (two grippers **174**, **176** are shown) and is configured to transfer the substrate between at least the input module **124** and the cleaning modules **160**. The second robot **170** includes at least one gripper (a gripper **178** is shown) and is configured to transfer the substrate between at least the one of the cleaning modules **160** and the dryer **162**.

In operation, the CMP system **100** is initiated with the unpolished substrate **122** being transferred from one of the cassettes **118** to the input module **124** by the interface robot **120**. The loading robot **104** then removes the substrate from the input module **124** and transfers the substrate **122** to the polishing module **106**, where the substrate **122** is polished while in a horizontal orientation. Once the substrate **122** is polished, the loading robot **104** extracts the substrate **122** from the polishing module **106** and places the polished substrate **122** in the input module **124** in a vertical orientation. The substrate handler **166** retrieves the polished substrate **122** from the input module **124** and moves the substrate through at least one of the cleaning modules **160** of the cleaner **116**. Each of the cleaning modules **160** is adapted to support a substrate in a vertical orientation throughout the cleaning process. Once cleaned, the handler **166** transfers the substrate to an output module **126**, where the cleaned substrate **122** is flipped to a horizontal orientation and returned by the interface robot **120** to one of the cassettes **118**.

The polishing module **106** includes at least one chemical mechanical planarizing (CMP) or other suitable planarizing station. In one embodiment, the polishing module **106** includes one or more chemical mechanical planarizing (CMP) station **130**, **132** disposed in an environmentally controlled enclosure **188**. Examples of polishing module **106** that can be adapted to benefit from the invention include MIRRA®, MIRRA MESA™, REFLEXION®, REFLEXION® LK, and REFLEXION LK Ecmp™ Chemical Mechanical Planarizing Systems, all available from Applied Materials, Inc. of Santa Clara, Calif. Other planarizing modules, including those that use processing pads, planarizing webs, or a combination thereof, and those that move a substrate relative to a planarizing surface in a rotational, linear or other planar motion may also be adapted to benefit from the invention.

The CMP stations **130**, **132** include a platen **186** that supports a removable polishing pad **184**. The platen **186** rotates the pad **184** while a slurry nozzle **192** provides a polishing fluid to the top surface of the pad **184** used for polishing the substrate **122**. A conditioner assembly **182** is disposed on the base **140** adjacent each of the CMP stations **130**, **132**. The conditioner assembly **182** includes a conditioning head **190** for periodically conditioning the pad **184** disposed in the CMP stations **130**, **132** for the purpose of maintaining uniform planarizing results.

The exemplary polishing module **106** also includes a transfer station **136** and a substrate handler **128** that are disposed on an upper side **138** of a machine base **140**. In one embodiment, the transfer station **136** includes two load cups **142**, **144**. The input buffer at load cup **142** receives unpolished substrates **122** from the factory interface **102** by the loading robot **104**. The loading robot **104** is also utilized to return polished substrates from the load cup **144** to the factory interface **102**. It is also contemplated that the load cup **142** may be used to transfer polished substrates while load cup **144** may be used to transfer unpolished substrates. It is further contemplated that each of the load cups **142**, **144** may be used to transfer both polished and unpolished substrates.

The substrate handler **128** may include a central rotating mechanism (hub **134**) and a plurality of polishing arms **150** extending cantilevered from the hub **134**. In one embodiment, the plurality of polishing arms **150** are pivotally attached to the hub **134** at a first end and each polishing arm **150** supports a polishing head assembly **152** at a second end. The polishing head assembly **152** may include a motor/actuator **154** and a polishing head **156**. It should be understood that the polishing head assembly **152**, containing the motor/actuator **154** and the polishing head **156**, may be disposed on each of the polishing arms **150**. The polishing head **156** is configured to hold the substrate **122** during polishing and while moving between CMP stations **130**, **132**. The motor/actuator **154** may be configured to press the substrate **122** while retained therein the polishing head **156** against the pad **184** disposed on the platen **186**. The motor/actuator **154** may also rotate the substrate **122** about the center line if the polishing head **156**.

In one embodiment, the hub **134**, with pivotally attached polishing arms **150**, is rotatable about its center axis. The polishing head assemblies **152** may be moved between the CMP stations **130**, **132** and the transfer station **136** by indexing the hub **134** about its center axis. Additionally, each polishing arm **150** may pivot independently relative to other polishing arms **150** so each polishing head **156** may move independently. Polishing head **156** may move between adjacent locations in the polishing module **106**. For example, the polishing head **156** may move between two adjacent polishing stations, two adjacent load cups, or adjacent load cup and polishing station depending on the rotational position of the hub.

Referring now to FIG. **2**, the CMP station **130** includes a motor **250** which may drive the rotation of the platen **186** about a platen centerline **256**. The motor **250** may be connected to the platen **186** by gears, pulleys and belts, direct drive, or other suitable actuator. In one embodiment depicted in FIG. **2**, the platen **186** is coupled to the motor **250** by pulleys **258** and belts **254**. The motor **250** may control the rotational speed and direction of the platen **186**. The CMP station **132** is similarly configured.

The hub **134** may have a central rotating mechanism that rotates the location of all pivotally attached polishing arms **150** and the attached polishing head assemblies **152** about a center axis **210** of the hub **134**. The rotation of the hub **134** may additionally result in the specific polishing heads **156** moving from one processing station to another. The center axis **210** of the hub **134** may also be the centerline of the hub **134**. A plurality of bearings **208** may stabilize the hub **134** while allowing the hub **134** to rotate. In one embodiment, the central rotating mechanism is a motor **216** which drives the rotation of the hub **134**. The motor **216** may be connected to the hub by gears, pulleys and belts, direct drive, or other suitable means. In one embodiment depicted in FIG. **2**, the hub **134** is coupled to the motor **216** by pulleys **212** and belts **214**.

Each polishing arm **150** is pivotally attached at a first end **260** to the hub **134** so that the polishing arm **150** may rotate relative the center axis **210** of the hub **134** and additionally rotate relative to an arm pivot axis **204**. In one embodiment, the arm pivot axis **204** of the polishing arm **150** is incongruent with the center axis **210** of the hub **134**. The arm pivot axis **204** may be equally spaced about the center axis **210** of the hub **134** to provide minimal interference with adjacent polishing arms **150**. For example, the pivot axis **204** for the polishing arms **150** may be arranged in a pattern, such as a bolt pattern, about the center axis **210** of the hub **134**.

Motor **220** or other suitable device causes the polishing arm **150** to pivot about the arm pivot axis **204**. The motor **220** may be connected to the hub by gears, pulleys and belts, direct drive, or other suitable actuator. In one embodiment depicted in FIG. **2**, polishing arm **150** is coupled to the motor **220** by pulleys **222** and belts **224**. As shown in FIG. **2**, the motor **220** may be placed inside the hub **134**. However, the motors **220**, **226** for driving the rotation of the polishing arms **150** may also be disposed within the polishing arms **150** or at other suitable locations for controlling the rotation of the polishing arms **150**.

The motor/actuator **154**, disposed at a second end **262** of the polishing arm **150**, controls the rotation and vertical displacement of the polishing head **156**. The motor/actuator **154** may be connected to the polishing head **156** by a series of gears, idlers, belts and pulleys, a direct drive, or other suitable means. The motor/actuator **154** may rotate the polishing head **156**, as well as the substrate **122** held by the polishing head **156**, about a polishing centerline **230**. Additionally, the motor/actuator **154** may move the polishing head **156** vertically up and down along the polishing centerline **230**, as shown by arrow **232**. Upon the polishing arm **150** rotating the polishing head **156** above the platen **186**, the motor/actuator **154** may move the polishing head **156** downward to place the substrate **122** in contact with the pad **184** for polishing the substrate **122**.

After polishing the substrate **122** on the pad **184**, the motor/actuator **154** may move the polishing head **156** upward so as the substrate **122** is clear of the pad **184** and the substrate **122** may be moved to another platen or to the load cup **142**. To appreciate the movement of the substrate **122** within the polishing module **106**, we turn the discussion to FIG. **3**.

FIG. **3** is a top view of the first embodiment for the hub **134** and attached polishing arms **150** shown in FIG. **2**. The hub **134** of the polishing module **106** may rotate about the center axis **210** of the hub **134** which may be at the center of the hub **134**, as shown by arrow **354**. The hub **134** includes three polishing arms **150** which rotate about the arm pivot axis **204**. In the embodiment depicted in FIG. **3**, the three polishing arms **150** are shown as: a first polishing arm **310** which pivots about a pivot **316** and may rotate as shown by arrow **314**; a second polishing arm **320** which pivots about a pivot **326** and may rotate as shown by arrow **324**; and a third polishing arm **330** which pivots about a pivot **336** and may rotate as shown by arrow **334**. The pivots **316**, **326**, **336** are arranged about the center axis **210** of the hub **134** and incongruent with the center axis **210**. Therefore the polishing arms **150** may move about the pivots **316**, **326**, **336** and may additionally move about the center axis **210** by pivoting the hub. For example, the third polishing arm **330** additionally rotates about the center axis **210** as shown by arrow **396** by pivoting the hub **134**.

Each polishing arm **150** supports a respective one of the polishing heads **156**. Each polishing head **156** holds a substrate **122** (not visible in FIG. **3**) for polishing in the polishing module **106**. The polishing head **156** may hold the substrate **122** in one polishing station for processing, then move the substrate **122** to the next polishing station for further processing. Alternatively, the polishing head **156** may retain the substrate **122** in a single polishing station then return the processed substrate **122** to the load cup without subsequent processing at the other polishing stations of the polishing module **106**. The time each substrate **122** spends at each polishing station may be different due to differences process requirements. To advance one substrate **122** upon completion of a first operation in the polishing module **106** prior to a second substrate finishing a second operation in the polishing module **106**, the polishing arms **150** are configured to move independently of each other. Thus, the first substrate retained in one polishing head may advance to perform subsequent operations while a second substrate retained in a different polishing head is still being polished in a different polishing station of the polishing module **106**.

Depending on where the hub **134** is indexed, the first polishing arm **310** may have access to one or more stations in the polishing module **106**. For instance, without rotating the hub **134**, the first polishing arm **310** may access the CMP station **132** by rotating clockwise about pivot **316**. Additionally, the first polishing arm **310** may access CMP station **130** by rotating counter clockwise about pivot **316**. Thus the substrate **122** held by the polishing head **156** supported by the first polishing arm **310** may have access to CMP station **130** and CMP station **132** without rotating the hub **134** or disturbing other substrates currently disposed in the polishing heads **156** of other polishing arms **320**, **330**.

The substrate **122** held by the polishing head **156** in the first polishing arm **310** may also be rotated between polishing stations **130**, **132** by indexing the hub **134**. In this manner the first polishing arm **310** may be advantageously positioned to move the substrate **122** between different stations or load cups of the polishing module **106**. For example, the first polishing arm **310** may be positioned above the CMP station **130** and the substrate **122** may require a second polishing operation on the CMP station **132**. During or upon completion of the polishing operation in the first polishing station **130**, the hub **134** may index in a clockwise direction so the first polishing arm **310** can reach the load cup **144** upon completion of a polishing operation on CMP station **132** without having to further rotate the hub **134** or affecting the operation of the other polishing arms **150**.

In another example, substrates **122** coming into the polishing module **106** may require but a single polishing operation by either the CMP station **130** or the CMP station **132**. Instead of each substrate **122** indexing with the hub **134** and waiting for a subsequent substrate to be polished, the hub **134** may be stationary and the polishing arms **150** may move the substrate back and forth between the adjacent CMP stations **130**, **132** and the load cups **142**, **144**. For instance, the hub **134** may be in a position wherein the second polishing arm **320**, by rotation about the pivot **326**, may access the load cup **144** and the CMP station **132**. Additionally, the third polishing arm **330** may access the load cup **142** and the CMP station **130** by rotation about the pivot **326**. Thus, a plurality of substrates may be loaded and processed on CMP station **130** and CMP station **132** independently of each other. Operating in this manner may effectively allow two different processes to be performed in different stations on a single polishing module **106**.

The various processes performed at the CMP stations **130**, **132** in the polishing module **106** may require more or less time than other processes performed at the CMP stations **130** **132** in the polishing module **106**. The operation of the polishing arms **150** pivotally attached to the hub **134** independent of each other provides optimization of the time required to process a substrate by not having to wait for the completion of processing other substrates. Additionally, the independence of each polishing arm **150** allows for the oscillation of the substrate **122** at the CMP station **130** while polishing without consideration of ongoing processes performed at the CMP station **132** in the polishing module **106**.

An understanding for the various movements of the substrates **122** through the polishing module **106** may benefit by briefly referring to FIG. **6**. FIG. **6** is a method for moving a substrate through a CMP system **100** shown in FIG. **2**.

At step **610**, a substrate is loaded from a load cup into a polishing head attached to a first end of a first polishing arm. A second end of the first polishing arm is pivotally attached to a pivot on an indexable hub. The pivot allows for the polishing arm to move independent of the indexable hub.

At step **620**, the substrate is moved to a processing station by either indexing the hub or rotating the first polishing arm about the pivot. Indexing the hub moves all the polishing arms attached to the hub. Thus, without pivoting the polishing arms, the substrates loaded into polishing heads supported by the polishing arms move from one location to another in the same direction the hub indexes. However, rotating the polishing arm moves each substrate individually without moving other substrates.

Additionally, a second substrate may be loaded into a second polishing head attached to a first end of a second polishing arm. A second end of the second polishing arm may be pivotally attached to a second pivot on the indexable hub. The second substrate may be moved to the processing station by rotating the second polishing arm about the second pivot if the hub was previously indexed or indexing the hub if the first polishing arm was rotated. By pivoting the second polishing arm instead of indexing the indexable hub, the location of the first polishing arm is unchanged. By indexing the hub, the polishing arms are advantageously placed to access additional polishing stations or load cups. Is this manner, substrates may be processed and moved independent of each other.

FIG. **4** depicts the partial cross sectional view of another embodiment of a substrate handler that may be used in the CMP system **100** of FIG. **1**. Although any number of arms may be utilized as space permits, three arms are described to simplify the description. In the second embodiment of FIG. **4**, the center axis **210**, of the hub **134**, and a center axis **402**, about which the polishing arms **150** may rotate, may be congruent. In one embodiment, the hub **134** does not index. In another embodiment, the hub **134** may index via a manner similar to that previously described with the discussion of FIG. **2**.

The hub **134** has rails **434**, **436** on which a first end **460** of the polishing arm **150** rides. The rails **434**, **436** are circular and along the perimeter of the hub **134** (As shown in FIG. **5**). The polishing arm **150** has a bottom bearing block **422** which rides on the rail **436** and a top bearing block **420** that rides on the rail **434** to allow the polishing arms **150** to freely move around the hub **134**. Alternately, the hub **134** and polishing arms **150** may have other suitable connections therebetween, such as internal rails or circular members, which allow the polishing arms **150** to move independently about the center axis **402** congruent with the center axis **210** of the hub **134**.

The polishing arm **150** may have a drive gear assembly **408**, or other suitable actuator, for moving the polishing arm **150** about the perimeter of the hub **134**. The drive gear assembly **408** may be disposed, wholly or in part, in the hub **134**. The drive gear assembly **408** may include a motor **440**, a pinion **412** and a rack **410**. The motor **440** may be attached to the polishing arm **150** proximate the perimeter of the hub **134**. The pinion **412** may be attached to the motor **440**. The pinion **412** engages the rack **410** attached to the hub **134**. The motor **440** rotates the pinion **412** which advances the polishing arm **150** along the rack **410** disposed along the perimeter of the hub **134**. By controlling the rotational direction of the pinion **412**, the angular direction in which the polishing arm **150** rotates about the center axis **402** may be selected. Advantageously, the drive gear assembly **408** is disposed inward of the platen and polishing pad. Therefore, substantially no contamination generated from the drive gear assembly **408** can fall upon the pad and affect substrate polishing operations.

In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. **4**, the motor **414** is disposed in the polishing arm **150**. In another embodiment, the motor **414** is disposed in the hub **134**. In yet another embodiment, the motor **414** may be disposed below the upper side **138** of the machine base **140**. It is contemplated that the motor **414** may be situated in any suitable location for interfacing with the drive gear assembly **408** and controlling the position of the polishing arm **150**.

The position of the polishing arm **150** selectively aligns the polishing heads **156** with the CMP stations **132**, **130** and/or the load cups **142**, **144**. After polishing the substrate **122** on the pad **184** in one CMP station, the substrate **122** may be moved to another CMP station or to one of the load cups. How the substrate **122** may be moved within the polishing module **106** is discussed below with reference to FIG. **5**.

FIG. **5** is a top view of the second embodiment of the hub **134** and attached polishing arms **150** in the polishing module **106** shown in FIG. **4**. In one embodiment, the hub **134** of the polishing module **106** may rotate about the center axis **402** as shown by arrow **556**. In another embodiment, the hub **134** may be stationary with only the polishing arms **150** rotating about the center axis **402**.

In the embodiment depicted in FIG. **5**, the hub **134** includes three polishing arms **150** all of which may rotate about the same center axis **402**. The polishing arms **150** are illustrated in FIG. **5** as: a first polishing arm **510** which pivots about the center axis **402** as shown by arrow **512**; a second polishing arm **520** which pivots about the center axis **402** as shown by arrow **522**; and a third polishing arm **530** which pivots about the center axis **402** as shown by arrow **532**.

Each polishing arm **150** supports a respective polishing head **156** which hold the substrate **122** (not visible in FIG. **5**) for polishing by the polishing module **106**. The polishing module **106** has a variety of stations including two CMP stations **130**, **132** and two load cups **142**, **144**. The substrate **122** may be processed in one or more of the polishing stations prior to being returned to the load cup for removal from the polishing module **106**. The polishing arms **150** may move independently of each other in order to advance the substrates **122** upon completion of a respective polishing operation without causing other substrates to move. Thus, the substrates may advance prior to and independently of processing for other substrates.

The polishing head **156** is rotatable about a polishing centerline **230** located at the end of the polishing arm **150** opposite the hub **134**. The first polishing arm **510** may rotate along the entire perimeter of the hub **134**. The rotation of the first polishing arm **510** may align the polishing head **156** selectively to one of the stations in the polishing module **106**. For instance, the first polishing arm **510** may access the CMP station **132** by rotating clockwise about the center axis **402**. Additionally, the first polishing arm **510** may access the load cup **142** by rotating counter clockwise about the center axis **402**. Thus the substrate **122** held by the polishing head **156** may have access to CMP station **130** and load cup **142** without rotating the hub **134** or disturbing other substrates **122** currently held by the other polishing arms **150**.

In another example, the substrates **122** coming into the polishing module **106** may require only a single polishing operation by either the CMP station **130** or the CMP station **132**. Instead of each substrate **122** indexing one at a time with the hub **134** and waiting for a subsequent substrate to be polished, the polishing arms **150** may move about the stationary hub **134** and thus move the substrate back and forth from the CMP station **130**, **132** to the load cups **142**, **144**. For instance, the first polishing arm **510** may independently access the load cup **142** and the CMP station **130**. Additionally, the third polishing arm **530** may independently access the load cup **144** and the CMP station **132**. Thus, a plurality of substrates may be loaded and processed on CMP station **130** and CMP station **132** independently and without interfering with the operation of each other.

Thus, the present invention represents a significant advancement in the field of semiconductor substrate cleaning and polishing. The substrate handler is adapted to support and transfer substrates in a manner which allows the substrates to be processed independently of each other. Thus, the handler is more versatile and more easily adaptable to various substrate processing sequences. Additionally, the placement of the drive mechanisms for the polishing arms facilitate the movement of the substrates without introducing contamination from the substrate handler which may affect substrate polishing operations.

While the foregoing is directed to embodiments of the present invention, other and further embodiments of the invention may be devised without departing from the basic scope thereof, and the scope thereof is determined by the claims that follow.

The invention claimed is:

1. A chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:
a platen;
a load cup;
a hub;
a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around a centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup; and
a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup, wherein the second polishing arm and first polishing arm rotate independently from a rotation of the hub.

2. The system of claim **1** further comprises:
a polishing head attached to the first polishing arm, wherein the polishing head is configured to hold a substrate and place the substrate against the platen during processing.

3. A chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:
a platen;
a load cup;
a hub rotatable about a first axis;
a first polishing arm pivotally attached to a first pivot on the hub and moveable between the platen and load cup; and
a second polishing arm pivotally attached to a second pivot on the hub and moveable between the platen and load cup.

4. The system of claim **3** further comprises:
a first motor disposed in the hub for rotating the first polishing arm; and
a second motor disposed in the hub for rotating the second polishing arm.

5. The system of claim **3** further comprises:
a drive gear assembly disposed in the hub; and
a motor engaging the drive gear assembly and operable to rotate the first polishing arm independently of the second polishing arm.

6. The system of claim **3** further comprises:
a polishing head attached to the first polishing arm, wherein the polishing head is configured to hold a substrate and place the substrate against the platen during processing.

7. The system of claim **6** further comprises:
a second load cup; and
a second platen.

8. The system of claim **7** wherein the first polishing arm and the second polishing arm are rotatable between the second load cup and the second platen.

9. The system of claim **8** wherein the second polishing arm is configured to move a second polishing head between the load cup and the platen without moving the polishing head of the first polishing arm.

10. The system of claim **7** wherein a centerline of the first pivot of the first polishing arm is incongruent with the centerline of the hub.

11. A method for moving a substrate by a substrate handler, the method comprising:
loading a substrate from a load cup into a first polishing head attached to a first end of a first polishing arm,

wherein a second end of the first polishing arm is pivotally attached to a first pivot on an indexable hub; and

moving the substrate to a processing station by either indexing the hub or rotating the first polishing arm about the first pivot.

12. The method of claim **11** further comprising:

loading a second substrate from the load cup into a second polishing head attached to the first end of a second polishing arm, wherein a second end of the second polishing arm is pivotally attached to a second pivot on the indexable hub; and

moving the second substrate to the processing station by rotating the second polishing arm about the second pivot if the hub was previously indexed or indexing the hub if the first polishing arm was rotated.

13. The method of claim **12** wherein moving the second substrate by pivoting the second polishing arm does not move the substrate in the first polishing arm.

14. The method of claim **11** wherein the first and second polishing head are configured to access at least one load cup and at least one platen.

15. The method of claim **14** wherein a first and second motion assembly configured to pivot the first and second polishing arms, are disposed inward of the load cup and platen.

16. The method of claim **12** wherein a centerline for the first and second pivots of the first and second polishing arms are incongruent with a centerline of the indexable hub.

17. A chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:

a platen;

a load cup;

a hub;

a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around a centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup;

a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup, the second polishing arm rotatable independently from the hub;

a first motor disposed in the hub for rotating the first polishing arm; and

a second motor disposed in the hub for rotating the second polishing arm.

18. A chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:

a platen;

a load cup;

a hub;

a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around a centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup;

a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup, the second polishing arm rotatable independently from the hub;

a drive gear assembly disposed in the hub; and

a motor engaging the drive gear assembly and operable to rotate the first polishing arm independently of the second polishing arm.

19. A chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:

a platen;

a load cup;

a hub;

a first polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around a centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup;

a second polishing arm cantilevered from the hub and rotatable around the centerline of the hub between the platen and the load cup, the second polishing arm rotatable independently from the hub;

a second load cup; and

a second platen.

20. The system of claim **19** wherein the first polishing arm and the second polishing arm are rotatable between the second load cup and the second platen.

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